

Tabernacle, Temple, Self

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In all the rich symbolism of ancient craft Masonry, two symbols of symbolic themes predominate. One is the search for light, the other is the labor of building. The source of light is the Holy Bible, and the grand representation of the builder's art is King Solomon's Temple.

Searching persistently and building carefully, the candidate travels slowly toward the east. As he pursues his quest for light and more light and still further light in Masonry, he learns by the way to use the working tools of the stone craftsman, until at last he finds himself portraying the character of the greatest of all legendary builds, the Master Architect of King Solomon's Temple. Searching and building, light and the temple - the two dominant Masonic themes are distinct but not separate, complementary rather than supplementary. And the search and the labor are not completed by the candidate within the lodge. Light is revealed, and the sacred source of all light is clearly indicated, but the search for complete illumination must be eternal. The temple in Masonic ritual is almost, but not quite completed; the allegory rises from a physical to a spiritual temple, "A house, not made with hands, eternal in the heavens". Regardless of symbolic revelations in Masonic degrees apart from the lodge, the unending itch and the labor toward perfection, begun in the lodge, must continue with the initiated Mason throughout his life.

When we study the building of King Solomon's Temple, we must go back in time from the year 1012 BC about four hundred eighty more years. Moses had led the people of Israel out of Egypt as a band of refugees. During the Hebrews wanderings in the desert, Moses received instructions from God for the building of a tabernacle while on Mount

Sinai. (Tabernacle, a temporary habitation, as a tent; also, the human body as a temporary abode of the soul.) The tabernacle and its furnishings could be carried from place to place.

Before we consider the tabernacle's details, notice the position of this tent in the Israelitish camp. Let us, in imagination, go back through centuries and look down from some lofty crag upon the mighty gathering. A vast plain filled with tents lies below us. But there is no confusion, no disorder. Every tribe is encamped by its own standard. On the East side are three tribes, on the North, South and West, three also. Four great divisions or army corps, under the four banners of the man, the lion, the ox and the eagle. Nearer the center and around the sacred enclosure are the tents of the priests and the three Levitical families, whose duty it was to transport the tabernacle from place to place. In the center of the camp stands the sacred tent, situated due east and west, surrounded by the white curtained wall, the center of the camp, the Shrine of the Jewish Palladium, the Ark of God.

Let us again, in imagination, watch these people on the march. The silver trumpets give the signal, the tents are struck. The tribes on the east - Judah, Issachar, and Zebulon - set out first. The tabernacle is taken down, the Gershonite and Merarite families of the Levites follow with the heavy portions of the structure. Then come the army corps of the South - Reuben, Simeon, and Gad. Next, in the center of the host, the Ark and the sacred furniture of the sanctuary, borne by the Kohathite Levites. With them go Moses and Aaron and the priests. Then come the tribes of the West - Ephraim, Manasseh, and Benjamin. While the tribes of Dan, Asher and Naphtali form the rear guard.

And now for some of the details of the structure itself. The materials were provided by the free offerings of the people. The people brought gifts of 3,140 pounds of gold, all of which was used throughout the tabernacle. In dollars and cents in today's world – \$24,617,600 at \$490 per ounce.

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The amount of silver used was 9,575 pounds, which came from the fifty-cent head tax collected from all those registered in the census who were twenty years old or older – a total of 603,550 men. The Bible says that every adult Israelite had to pay half a shekel as atonement money. Again in dollars and cents of today – \$804,300 at \$6.90 per ounce. 7,540 pounds of bronze or \$15,080 was used in the construction, even the nails used in the tabernacle and court were bronze.

All the woodwork of the tabernacle was of the same tree, translated in the Bible as Shittim Wood. This is the plural form of the Shittah tree, and has been identified with the "acacia seyal", a thorny tree which flourishes in the Sinai Peninsula. It is called the wood that will not rot. It appears to be the only good wood produced in the wilderness, and no other wood was used in the tabernacle or its furniture.

All of the weaving, and skins, wools and jewels were of the finest quality. The people brought so much that Moses had to tell them that no more materials were needed.

God also specifically appointed Bezalel (the son of Uri and grandson of Hun of the Tribe of Judah) as General Superintendent of the project. He was able to create beautiful workmanship from gold, silver and bronze; he could cut and set stones like a jeweler, and could do beautiful carving; in fact, he had every needed skill.

According to the Bible, the place of worship was 30 cubits long (45 feet), 10 cubits wide (15 feet), and 10 cubits high (15 feet). The tabernacle stood within a courtyard, 100 cubits long (150 feet) and 50 cubits wide (75 feet). This was enclosed by rich curtains and brass pillars. The entrance faced the east, as did the altar where the people brought their sacrifices. The Holy of Holies was at the west, an arrangement which we have adopted in both our churches and our lodges.

When at last the work was completed according to God's plans, a cloud covered the tabernacle and the glory of the Lord filled it. Whenever the cloud lifted and moved, the

people of Israel journeyed onward, following it. But if the cloud stayed, they stayed until it moved. The cloud rested upon the tabernacle during the day time, and at night there was fire in the cloud so that all the people of Israel could see it. This continued throughout their journeys. The tabernacle and its furnishings were moved from the desert to Gilgal, then to Shiloh after the Israelites conquered Canaan. Later, it was moved to Nob, then to Gibeon, and finally brought to Jerusalem.

This construction has a parallel in the building of King Solomon's Temple. King David, Solomon's father, had displeased God. Satan had made David decide to take a military census of the people of Israel and Judah. Upon seeing God's wrath, David repented and purchased the threshing floor of Oran the Jebusite to build an altar to the Lord. This piece of land, and including oxen offered by David as a sacrifice, was purchased at the cost of about fifty shekels of silver (a shekel is 1/2 ounce of silver) or about \$126.50. This amount is according to the Mentors Manual, but the Living Bible says David paid \$4,300 in gold or literally 600 shekels of gold by weight - \$147,000 at today's prices. David declared that on this site, the temple of the Lord will be built and an altar will be constructed for Israel's burnt offering. Gold, silver, iron and bronze; timber and stone for walls were collected by King David. He desired to build the temple, but because his reign had been one of many wars and much bloodshed, this privilege was denied him. David died at an old age, wealthy and honored, and his son Solomon reigned in his place.

The actual construction of the temple began on the 17th day of April in the 4th year of King Solomon's reign. Timber had been selected from Hiram, King of Tyre. Solomon had also asked for a man named Hiram to come to Tyre, as he was a skilled craftsman in bronze work. He was half Jewish, being the son of a widow of the Tribe of Naphtali, and his father had been a foundry worker in Tyre.

The location of the temple was Mount Moriah, the name meaning "Jehovah sees". This was an elevation on the edge of the city of Jerusalem. In some ways, it was not the most desirable spot, but was chosen on account of its sacred associations, for here, years

before, Abraham had prepared to sacrifice his son, Isaac, to make manifest his faith in Jehovah.

The land had already been cleared and the building of terraces started so that the temple on a rocky ledge or platform at the highest point would have before and below it a series of extensive courts at descending levels. (II Chronicles 2, 1-18). Seventy thousand porters to transport materials, and eighty thousand men to work in the stone quarries were levied. To oversee the work, three thousand, three hundred officers were appointed. A monthly supply of ten thousand measures of grain to furnish food for this huge army of workers, supplemented by a like amount of wine and huge quantities of olive oil and mead were obtained.

32 quarts = 1 bushel

8 gallons = 1 bushel

80,000 gallons of wine

Quarries from which building material was secured were located in the hills near Jerusalem. A form of white limestone called dolomite occurs here in large quantities. A peculiar trait of this substance is that when first removed, it is relatively soft and easy to work. Wooden wedges break out blocks and saws shape them. This can be done so accurately that the pieces fit exactly into a structure when built without further cutting or shaping. Moreover, after this stone weathers when exposed to wind and sun, it hardens, making possible a high degree of surface polish. Even the foundations were to be laid with it.

The foundation was 60 cubits long (90 feet) and 20 cubits wide (30 feet). A covered porch ran along the entire 20 cubits width (30 feet) of the house, with the inner walls and ceiling overlaid with pure gold. The roof was 120 cubits high (180 feet). We must remember that the Temple of Solomon was an exact replica as to scale of the tabernacle with the measurements doubled.

A cubit is equal to .462 meter. It is a measure of length, originally denoting the distance from the elbow to the extremity of the middle finger, or the fourth part of a well-proportioned man's stature. Hasting's Dictionary of the Bible declares that we have, at present, no means of ascertaining the exact dimensions of the Hebrews cubits. The balance of evidence is certainly in favor of a fairly close approximation to the Egyptian system. This being the case, we may take the common cubit as 18 inches and the royal cubit is 21 inches as in the Egyptian system of measurements.

It is my opinion that when Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt, they brought with them the Egyptian cubit measure. More than 5,000 years ago, Egyptians established the black granite cubit stick as their standard of measurement because of its hardness and durability. At each coming of the full moon, the overseer had to return to compare his cubit stick with the royal master. This was done lest inaccuracy and punishment resulted. Can you imagine how many different measurements there would have been in one building had each man used his arm to measure by?

The main part of the Temple was paneled with cypress wood, plated with pure gold and engraved with palm trees and chains. Beautiful jewels were inlaid into the walls to add to the beauty; the gold, by the way, was of the best, from Parvaim. All the walls, beams, doors and thresholds throughout the temple were plated with gold, with angels engraved on the walls.

For the temple itself, not size, but rather exquisite workmanship was the aim. The building was really not intended for public worship, but rather as a house for the Ark of the Covenant which contained the tablets of stone put there by Moses, on which were written the Ten Commandments. This sacred object was to be placed in the inner sanctuary beyond the holy place where only the priests might enter. The High Priest, and he alone, was to have access to the ark in the most holy place. The first room was 20 cubits (30 feet) square. This, too, was overlaid with the finest gold, valued at \$18 million dollars. Twenty-six ounce gold nails (\$490,000) were used here (12,740). Within the innermost

room, where the ark was to rest, Solomon placed two sculptured statues of angels, and plated them with gold. They stood on the floor facing the outer room, with wings stretched wingtip to wingtip across the room from wall to wall. Across the entrance to this room he placed a veil of blue and crimson fine-spun linen, decorated with angels.

The courts in connection with the temple were large and could accommodate huge masses of people for ceremonies and worship. They were to be set off, one from the other, by low walls, colonnades and wide stairways. The lowest level even provided a meeting place for those not of the faith of Israel, the Gentiles.

The plans also called for a new house for the King, a porch of pillars where distinguished guest could be received, and a porch of judgment where the throne was to be located from which pronouncements would be made on cases brought before the ruler. A large building called the House of the Forest of Lebanon was to be erected to serve as a place of assembly, and for storage of treasure and arms. These structures were to be built on ground adjacent to the temple, and work on them was to be started as soon as the work on the principal edifice was under way.

At the front of the temple, and within a porch, Solomon had placed two pillars 35 cubits high (52 1/2 feet), topped by a 5-cubit capital (7 1/2 feet) flaring out to the roof. Chains were made and placed on top of them with 400 pomegranates attached to the chains. These pillars were given names, the one of the right, Jachin, which means "to establish" and the one of one on the left, "Boaz", which means "strength". They were placed there as a memorial to the children of Israel, of the happy deliverance of their forefathers from Egyptian bondage, and in commemoration of the miraculous pillars of fire and cloud. The pillar of fire gave light to the Israelites and facilitated their march, and the cloud provided darkness to Pharaoh and his host, and retarded their pursuit. King Solomon, therefore, ordered these pillars to be placed at the entrance of the temple, at the most conspicuous part, that the children of Israel might have that happy event continually before their eyes, in going to and returning from divine worship.

Carefully following God's instructions, all of the interior and furnishings were made to His specifications. So, King Solomon's temple was the permanent edifice of the plans given to Moses for the tabernacle.

So, the temple was finally finished, and Solomon prepared for the transferring of the Ark from the tabernacle in the city of David to its new home in the temple. This celebration took place in October, the ark was carried to the temple and the priests placed it in the inner room of the temple – the Holy of Holies.

The enormous wealth used in the construction of the temple, computed in present day values, will enable us more us more fully to appreciate the great task involved in its construction and the superb results attained.

The one hundred thousand talents of gold would amount to three billion, two hundred forty-two million, three hundred twenty-four thousand (\$3,242,324,000). Now, remember, this was figured on gold value in 1975, I wouldn't be able to read the figure based on today's market rate. The thousand talents of silver, \$1,811,160. The three thousand talents of gold from David's private purse would make \$97,479,720; seven thousand talents of silver, \$12,678,120 and five thousand talents and ten thousand drams of gold, offered by the people, \$162,521,200; ten thousand talents of silver, \$18,111,600. The value of the precious metals, carefully tabulated, equals the sum of \$ 51,274,640, to all this must be added the value of the brass and iron (\$15,295,724.00) without weight, for it is in abundance, the precious stones, onyx stones, semi-precious stones, great stones, marble, woods, fine linens, fabrics, skins, etc., and the services of thousands of skilled laborers.

Without a doubt, King Solomon's temple was the grandest, most costly structure ever erected and dedicated to the worship of the true God.

King Solomon's Temple is an inexhaustible area of interpretation. The symbolism of the temple for a Freemason is founded upon the conception of man himself as a living temple for the enthronement of God within each of us. Freemasonry undertakes the task of helping each of us to build a more stately mansion for the indwelling of God. This is based upon that beautiful passage in the Paul's Letter to the Corinthians: "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the spirit of God dwellest in you." In this task, Freemasonry seeks to cause the individual to become more conscious of the fact that he is a symbolic temple and that he should aspire to the same type of perfection in his temple of character as Solomon sought for the temple at Jerusalem. Our individual temples are mental, physical, and spiritual and should not be degraded by inferior workmanship on our own part. Each selects the silver and gold, the precious stones and furnishings. Each controls the quality and value. None of us will see the completion of our own temple. The working tools will drop from our hands while plans for the employment of many years are yet on the trestle board.